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AGRICULTURAL ELEMENT
OF THE
COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO
GENERAL PLAN

* * * * *

DECEMBER 15, 1993

County of Sacramento
Planning and Community Development Department
General and Advance Planning Section

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1. The first part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the committee.

2. The second part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the committee who have been elected to the office of Chairman.

3. The third part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the committee who have been elected to the office of Secretary.

4. The fourth part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the committee who have been elected to the office of Treasurer.

5. The fifth part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the committee who have been elected to the office of Vice-Chairman.

SACRAMENTO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN
AGRICULTURAL ELEMENT

PREFACE

GOALS

The Sacramento County General Plan provides for growth and development in the unincorporated area through the 2010. Portions of the Plan contain policies for urban development including urban communities and the infrastructure necessary to serve them. Other sections of the Plan describe strategies to recognize and preserve areas of open space and natural resources. As a whole, the Plan reflects a decision between the amount and location of land uses in an urban setting and the uses needing to be unimpaired by urban activities.

Most of the land outside the urban area is used for agricultural purposes and agriculture is the planned continuing land use. Just as the General Plan has policies designed to make the planned urban land uses develop and function, the General Plan should also reflect policies on how the County will support as well as appropriately regulate the use of agricultural land.

The goal of this element includes the challenge of, "maintenance of the County's agricultural lands, (and) their agricultural productivity..." The two issues, land and productivity are related but are not the same. The discussions that follow focus mostly on the land issue but include sensitivity to policies and actions that support the productivity of agricultural uses.

The Element does not suggest any radical restructuring of the agricultural economic system by the County. The Element does suggest, however, some ways in which changes to County policies, programs, and regulations can help sustain agricultural activities.

Agriculture provides nearly all of society's food and is an important provider of open space, especially in the vicinity of metropolitan areas. Sacramento County (County) has recognized the key importance of agricultural issues by incorporating this agricultural element into its general plan update. This element is intended to promote achievement of two general goals:

- ° maintenance of the County's agricultural lands, their agricultural productivity and natural resource benefits they provide, and
- ° maintenance of farming and related industries as a strong and viable sector of the economy of a rapidly urbanizing county.

BACKGROUND

The Agricultural Element was prepared by the Sacramento County Agricultural Element Advisory Committee (Committee), made up of county farmers, ranchers, and agricultural officials. The Committee consists of the following members:

John Greber
Hog farmer
Elk Grove

Jay Schneider
Rancher
Sloughhouse

John Lewallen
Farmer
Walnut Grove

Peter Struffenegger
Farmer
Herald

John Mulrooney
Farmer
Galt

Case Van Steyn
Dairy farmer
Elk Grove

Art Perham
Rancher
Elk Grove

Eric Vink
American Farmland Trust
San Francisco

Peter Rooney
Rancher
Sacramento

Mark White, Kerry Steele
U.S. Soil Conservation Service
Sacramento

The Agricultural Element evolved through a series of reports and discussions of the Committee. The first report was a background summation of the county's farmland resources, agricultural production, and agricultural economy (Jones & Stokes Associates 1990a). This report concluded with a preliminary list of issues that could potentially affect the future of agriculture in the county. The second report assessed the importance and relevance of each issue identified in the background report, and evaluated alternative policies to address each issue determined to be important and relevant to the General Plan (Jones & Stokes Associates 1990b). Information from these reports was revised by the Committee in preparing the Agricultural Element.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ELEMENTS

The Agricultural Element is coordinated with several other elements of the General Plan (Table 1). It interacts primarily with the policies of the Land Use, Open Space, and Conservation Elements. To avoid duplication, policies contained in these elements that affect agriculture are not repeated in this element. Such policies are cross-referenced in the "Intent" sections of this element, however.

It is important to note that the Agricultural Element must be read and understood in the context of the rest of the General Plan. The Plan does provide for the planned conversion of some farm land to urban uses. It also provides for areas of permanent open space and contains comprehensive strategies and requirements for both urban and non-urban land uses.

ORGANIZATION

The remainder of this element consists of two sections, one focusing on protection of farmlands and agricultural resources, and one focusing on strengthening the county's agricultural economy.

Figure 1
Agricultural Element Relationships

<u>Goals</u>	<u>General Plan Element</u>	<u>Issue</u>
] Farmland and agricultural] resource protection]]]]]]]]]]]]]]	] Land Use Element]]]]	°Urban Expansion
		°Buffer Zones
		°Special Agricultural Preserves
		°Runoff Control
	] Resource Conservation] Element]]]]]]]]]	°Wild life Refuges
		°Natural Resource Preserves
		°Mitigation Sites
		°Groundwater Depletion
		°Flooding
		°Soil Erosion
	] Safety Element]]	°Rural Crime
		°Flooding
	] Open Space Element]]]	°Development Rights Acquisition
] Agricultural economic] viability]]]]]]]]]	] Land Use Element]]]]	°Pest Hazard Control
		°Wildfire Hazard Control
		°Floodplain Accessory Structures
		°Aggregate Mining
		°Farmstands
	] Housing Element]]]]	°Farm Employee Housing

SACRAMENTO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN
AGRICULTURAL ELEMENT

SECTION I

FARMLAND AND AGRICULTURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

GOAL: Protect important farmlands from conversion and encroachment and conserve agricultural resources.

INTRODUCTION

Farmland is the fundamental agricultural resource. County farmlands are being encroached upon by urban developments, wildlife preserves, and outdoor recreation facilities. With rare exceptions, conversions of farmland to nonfarm uses are irreversible. Farmland conversions affect agricultural productivity directly by reducing the farmland base, and indirectly by increasing production costs or reducing yields on neighboring farmlands. Farmland losses reduce the ability of the county to supply food to local and export markets. The cumulative effects of individual farmland conversions include urban growth inducement, unstable rural real estate markets, and reduced viability of the local agricultural economy.

The converse relationship is also true: lack of viable agricultural productivity tends to lead to conversions of land to other, often conflicting uses. The real or perceived lack of viability may be caused by many factors including: growth pressures, unstable or reduced real estate values, cost of water or energy, and government regulation.

Closely aligned with farmland protection measures are conservation of soil and water resources and protection of the capital investments essential to farming.

Farmland resource protection is addressed in the General Plan by the policies and programs described below and intended to meet the following objectives.

1. Protect prime farmlands and lands with intensive agricultural investments from conversion and encroachment.
2. Reduce groundwater depletion in areas of the county experiencing overdraft.
3. Control wind erosion resulting from soil disturbance.
4. Protect permanent crops and other agricultural investments from catastrophic flooding.

URBAN ENCROACHMENT

Objective: Prime farmlands (as defined by the California Department of Conservation) and lands with intensive agricultural investments (such as orchards, vineyards, dairies, and other concentrated livestock or poultry operations) protected from urban encroachment.

Intent: Agriculture usually becomes less feasible when population growth and urban development occur in farming areas. Urban encroachment results in increased road congestion making movement of farm equipment and crops more difficult; unauthorized and unlawful activities on farms, and increased risk of personal injury liability for farmers. Urbanization is particularly disruptive of agriculture when developments are located amid farming operations rather than contiguous with existing urban areas.

Farming next to urban areas often results in complaints regarding pesticides, dust, smoke, odors, or noise generated by accepted farming practices. Sacramento County has adopted a right-to-farm ordinance to provide legal assurance that established agricultural operations are allowed to continue, and to inform residents of areas zoned or designated for agriculture that they may be subject to inconvenience or discomfort resulting from accepted agricultural operations. This ordinance does not, however, prevent residents of farming areas from complaining about such inconvenience or discomfort.

The specific policies about separating and protecting agricultural lands and activities from urban development does not mean that no development can occur outside of the urban area. The County General Plan recognizes the maintenance and hinted expansion of existing agricultural communities and the continued development of planned agricultural-residential (ag-res) development.

Policies:

- AG-1. The County shall protect prime farmlands and lands with intensive agricultural investments from urban encroachments.
- AG-2. The County shall not accept applications for General Plan amendments redesignating prime farmland or lands with intensive agricultural investments to agricultural/residential or urban use (i.e., residential, commercial, industrial) unless proposed development is contiguous to agricultural/residential or urban uses, and unless the applicant demonstrates no feasible alternative sites are available other than prime farmlands or lands with intensive agricultural investment.

AG-3. The County shall permit agricultural uses on buffers, provided such uses are conducted in a manner compatible with urban uses. Buffers shall be used to separate farming practices incompatible with adjacent urban uses. Any homeowners' association or similar entity within the development shall assist in determining compatible use. Buffers shall not adversely conflict with agricultural uses on adjoining property.

AG-4. Prospective buyers of agricultural land or property adjacent to agricultural land shall be notified through the title report that they could be subject to inconvenience or discomfort resulting from accepted farming activities as per provisions of the county right-to-farm ordinance.

AG-5. Mitigate loss of prime farmlands or lands with intensive agricultural investments through CEQA requirements to provide in-kind protection of nearby farmland.

Implementation Measures:

- A. Prepare a map of the county's prime farmlands and lands with intensive agricultural investments, using the California Department of Conservation's definition of prime farmlands, and defining lands with intensive agricultural investments to include orchards, vineyards, dairies, and other intensive livestock and poultry operations. (Agriculture)
- B. Prepare a resolution for Board adoption authorizing the Planning Department not to accept applications for General Plan amendments redesignating to urban use prime farmlands or lands with intensive agricultural investment within the urban service boundary or lands that are not contiguous to existing urban developments. (Planning)
- C. Develop procedures for assessing the availability of feasible alternative sites for urban developments utilizing policies found elsewhere in this plan. In determining feasibility, exclude circumstance directly related to the applicant. (Planning)
- D. Develop and implement guidelines for design of buffers to be established between areas in a Permanent Agricultural Zone proposed for conversion from agricultural to urban use and adjacent farmlands. Develop and implement procedures for evaluating site-specific buffer proposals and making recommendations to the County Planning Commission. Title to buffer areas may be transferred to the County or other appropriate entity, but shall be credited to the proposed development as open space. Buffer design criteria shall include, but not be limited to, the following:
 - ° buffers shall generally consist of a physical separation 300-500 feet wide including roadways;
 - ° narrower buffers may be approved depending on the natural features of the buffer, applicable specific plan policies, and on the relative intensities of the proposed urban use and the adjacent agricultural use; and

- ° buffers shall be established on the parcel proposed for development and be fenced along its urban side and posted against trespass. (Planning)
- E. Develop and implement guidelines for maintenance of buffers including, but not limited to, the following criteria:
 - ° the County, a homeowners association, or other appropriate entity shall maintain buffers to control litter, fire hazards, and pests;
 - ° compatible agriculture shall be allowed on buffers; and
 - ° buffers may be removed once agricultural uses on all adjacent parcels have permanently ceased. (Planning)
- F. Amend the County Right-to-Farm Ordinance to implement Policy 5. (Planning)
- G. Erect signs on County roads adjacent to agricultural roads warning motorists that they may encounter slow-moving vehicles and to use caution. (Public Works)
- H. Actively encourage participation by rural residents of county in crime prevention programs. (Sheriff)

AGRICULTURAL ZONING

Objective: Retain agricultural land holdings in units large enough to guarantee future and continued agricultural use.

Intent: State law requires that zoning be consistent with the General Plan. Sacramento County's zoning consistency program results in zoning General Plan agricultural land use categories to large-lot exclusive agricultural zones. The following policies provide guidance on appropriate minimum parcel sizes and the division of agricultural parcels.

Although they relate minimum parcel size to soil capability classes, it is important to emphasize that the policies do not necessarily presume that it is possible to support economically viable farming operations on 20, 40, or 80 acre farming units. This may be true in certain instances involving specified crops or animal husbandry operations, but for the most part substantially larger acreage is necessary to sustain a farming enterprise. The minimum sizes established by these policies reflect a balance between the need to maintain economic farming units, provide some flexibility and options for landowners, and recognize that larger minimums would render numerous preexisting parcels nonconforming.

There is increasing interest in splitting large agricultural holdings into tracts of minimum size lots intended for buyers whose primary interests are large estates, speculation, or other non-farming priorities. To the extent that this occurs with regularity, it may undercut efforts to maintain agriculturally productive land.

Policies:

- AG-6. Require agricultural land divisions to meet the following minimum parcel sizes:

<u>General Plan Land Use Category</u>	<u>Minimum Parcel Size</u>
Agricultural Cropland	
SCS Soil Classes I and II	40 acres
SCS Soil Classes III and IV	80 acres
General Agriculture 20	20 acres
General Agriculture 80	80 acres
Agriculture Urban Reserve	10 acres

- AG-7. Agricultural zoning district boundaries shall be rational and shall respect parcel boundaries.
- AG-8. Agricultural land divisions shall not adversely affect the integrity of agricultural pursuits. Agricultural land divisions may be denied if the reviewing authority finds that the division of land is likely to create circumstances inconsistent with this policy.

Implementation Measure:

- A. Evaluate minimum parcel sizes necessary for sustained agricultural productivity on SCS soil classes I through IV, and amend Policy AG-6 according to the results of that analysis. (PLANNING)

ENCROACHMENT BY NATURAL RESOURCE PRESERVES

Objective: **Prime farmlands and farmlands with intensive agricultural investments protected from encroachment by natural resource preserves without compromising biologic diversity and habitat values.**

Intent: In addition to encroachments by urban developments, county farmlands are potentially threatened by conversion to wildlife refuges, regulations curtailing agricultural practices to protect adjacent natural resource preserves, and adverse public use impacts associated with outdoor recreational facilities and trails. For example, the proposed Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge could possibly convert areas of prime farmlands and farms with intensive agricultural investments to wildlife habitat and lead to additional spraying controls on remaining nearby farmland.

Balancing farmland protection in concert with habitat preservation so as to maintain the County's multiple natural resource values is the keystone for much of the policy proposed in the Draft General Plan. Disruption of one resource value for another is an historic pattern of land development in the County. In attempt to restore a fraction of the County's multiple resource base some changes in land use may occur. For instance, the Draft Open Space Element

proposes acquiring fee title to several rural areas featuring unusual natural resource values such as vernal pools or riparian forests. Some of these areas are being used for livestock grazing or crop production, activities that could be displaced or disrupted if these parcels are acquired for natural resource preserves.

Policies:

- AG-9. The County shall balance the protection of prime farmlands and farmlands with intensive agricultural investments with the preservation of natural habitat realized by the establishment of environmental mitigation banks and sites, wildlife refuges and other natural resource preserves so as to protect farmland and to conserve associated habitat values.
- AG-10. Mitigation banks, environmental mitigation sites, wildlife refuges, and other natural resource preserves adjacent to prime farmland or land with intensive agricultural investments shall not disrupt or disturb standard farming practices.
- AG-11. The County would adopt policies and design contracts to promote the placing of natural amenities on land, such as trees and other biota enhancing improvement, by making sure amenities are assets both in nature and under law.
- AG-12. Indemnification against property losses from recreational users shall be provided to agricultural property owners adjacent to mitigation banks, environmental mitigation sites, wildlife refuges, or other natural resource preserves provided loss is proven to be a direct and exclusive result of new recreational access provided by the establishment of, and occurring through, such sites, and provide law enforcement access to such sites.
- AG-13. Initiate intergovernmental agreements with State and Federal Wildlife management authorities in order to mitigate loss of prime farmland or land with intensive agricultural investment due to natural habitat conversion.
- AG-14. The County shall pursue opportunities to create mitigation banks, environmental mitigation sites, wildlife refuges, or other natural resource preserves wherein substantial agricultural activities that are compatible with protection of high habitat values continue, but incompatible activities and conversion for development are precluded by conservation easements.
- AG-15. Instigate coordination with nonprofit organizations to acquire conservation easements for preserving farmlands.

Implementation Measures:

- A. Minimize impacts on agricultural production resulting from establishment of County wildlife refuges or other County natural resource preserves by selecting for such refuges or preserves lands other than prime farmlands or lands with intensive agricultural investments and by establishing enforceable management agreements that provide for continued farming whenever possible. Ongoing. (Planning)
- B. As part of indemnification program create a claims procedure to process loss claims resulting from recreational uses located adjacent to agricultural land. (Parks)
- C. Develop procedures for assessing the availability of feasible alternative sites for natural resource preserves and mitigation sites. (Planning)
- D. Determine funding source for publicly acquired conservation easements geared to protecting farmland. (Planning)

ENCROACHMENT BY RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Objective: Farmlands protected from encroachments by recreational facilities and unlawful activities associated with use of recreational facilities.

Intent: Demand for recreational use of open space has increased with the county's upsurge in population. Unauthorized use of farmlands by recreationists or by others gaining ingress to farmlands through public recreation facilities, has also increased. Such trespassers sometimes disturb livestock, steal or damage property, or litter the area they use. The County is considering establishing new public trailways in several rural areas. Such trailways could displace agricultural activities, increase the difficulty of farming adjacent lands by dividing fields or pastures, and increase the frequency of farm trespass.

Policies:

- AG-16. The County shall actively discourage unlawful activities on farmlands associated with use of public recreation facilities.
- AG-17. Recreational trails shall not be placed adjacent to or on farmland if feasible alternative routes exist elsewhere in the vicinity. However, if no other feasible routes exist, trail facilities shall be designed in cooperation with adjacent property owners to minimize adverse impacts on farming practices.
- AG-18. Public recreation trails adjacent to permanent agriculture shall be designed to provide appropriate vehicle access for law enforcement needs.

AG-19. County encourages the preservation of prime agricultural land as open space, including opposing any residential or commercial development for the Cosumnes River or Deer Creek riparian areas which is not compatible with agricultural use.

AG-20. If land within the Cosumnes River watershed is developed for non-agricultural purposes, the County should actively pursue easement dedication for equestrian trails and bikeways within such development as a condition of approval.

AG-21. The County seeks to minimize agricultural/trail-user conflicts by recommending and seeking buffer zones between trails and nearby agricultural land and by locating trails away from the Cosumnes and Deer Creek riparian areas.

Implementation Measures:

- A. When selecting locations for County trailways, avoid whenever possible, alignments which bisect prime farmlands, lands with intensive agricultural investment, and adjacent riparian areas. Ongoing. (Parks and Recreation)
- B. Erect fences or other physical barriers adequate to limit access along County trailways adjacent to agricultural lands, except where such barriers would disrupt agriculture. Ongoing. (Parks and Recreation)
- C. Review the adequacy and enforcement of the County's trespass ordinance with the intent of increasing the effectiveness of trespass control, especially where trespass originates on County-owned land. (Sheriff, District Attorney)
- D. Review annual budgets to ensure that funding for adequate law enforcement patrols of County trailways is made available. (Parks and Recreation)
- E. Adopt and enforce an ordinance prohibiting access to County trailways between the hours of sunset and sunrise. (Parks and Recreation)
- F. Adopt and enforce an ordinance prohibiting night fishing in agricultural areas of the county. (Board of Supervisors, Parks and Recreation)

WILLIAMSON ACT

Objective: Ten thousand-acre increase in land under Williamson Act contract and percentage of contract lands with nonrenewal notices stabilized or reduced.

Intent: The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly called the Williamson Act, has long been the mainstay of Sacramento County's agricultural land preservation program. The purpose of the Williamson Act is to secure a long-term landowner commitment to maintain farmland in agricultural uses in exchange for assessment of the land based upon use rather than market value.

By 1989, twenty years after the program's initiation, 253,240 acres, representing 38 percent of the County had been placed under contract.

Because of the County's growing demands for urban development, maintenance of a strong agricultural sector requires stable land use patterns in the county's important farming areas. The General Plan policy structure is largely supported by a boundary demarking the difference between urban and rural land use. Maintenance and expansion of contracted land outside the urban service boundary strengthens the County's planning objectives of concentrating growth so as to be efficiently serviced and to preserve agricultural lands. The boundary clearly delineates lands that are to remain in open space or agricultural uses and should essentially eliminate much development pressure to convert agricultural lands to urban uses.

Sacramento's recent growth surge has been accompanied by a dramatic speculative increase in farmland prices and a large increase in the filing of nonrenewal notices. The current nonrenewal procedure allows landowners holding contracts for ten years or more to terminate the contract ten years after filing the notice of nonrenewal. This equates to a 20 year commitment for agricultural landowners. This commitment is more restrictive than the minimum 10 year term required by state law. Reducing the initial contract term could encourage applications for Williamson Act contracts for lands not currently enrolled.

The County should actively encourage new contracts through public information programs and consider limited application fee waivers for applicants. The County can also encourage landowners who have filed notices of nonrenewal to rescind their contracts in favor of a new contract with full tax benefits, as per California State Government Code Sections 51254-55.

Policy:

- AG-22. The County shall actively encourage enrollments of agricultural lands in its Williamson Act program.
- AG-23. Discourage property owners from filing notices of nonrenewal.
- AG-24. Support and promote the rescission of notices of nonrenewal and replacement of Williamson Act contracts, pursuant to the provisions of Government Code Section 51254, in areas outside the Urban Services Boundary for which notices of nonrenewal have been filed.

Implementation Measures:

- A. Amend the County Williamson Act Ordinance to establish an initial contract term of 10 years.
- B. Prepare and distribute a brochure to property owners with Williamson Act contracts and property owners eligible to enter into contracts. The brochure should explain County Williamson Act policies and effects of nonrenewal. (Planning)

- C. Make periodic presentations on Williamson Act benefits and County open space policy to farm groups, rural community councils and other appropriate forums. (Planning and Assessor)
- D. Authorize waiver of application fees for limited period in conjunction with Williamson Act promotions. (Planning)
- E. Develop computerized monitoring of agricultural preserves using a Geographic Information System. (Planning)

GROUNDWATER DEPLETION

Objective: Groundwater overdraft reduced or eliminated in farming areas.

Intent: Groundwater depletion has caused pumping costs to increase substantially in some farming areas of the county including the Elk Grove and Galt areas. Increasing pumping costs have reduced the viability of farming in these areas. Substantial urban development is planned for these areas. Such developments could increase demands on local aquifers unless alternative surface water supplies are made available to them.

Policy:

AG-25. The County shall actively encourage water conservation by both agricultural and urban water users.

Implementation Measures:

- A. Promote, through educational and technical assistance programs, adoption of water conservation measures. Ongoing. (Public Works, Cooperative Extension)

WIND EROSION

Objective: Reduced soil erosion.

Intent: The Delta area of the county has a high concentration of light-textured soils highly susceptible to wind erosion. Tillage and other farming operations increase the rate of wind erosion and the amount of airborne dust. The draft Conservation Element includes a policy recommending tillage practices to reduce soil losses. The following policy would assist farmers in reducing wind erosion and airborne dust.

Policy:

AG-26. The County shall actively encourage conservation of soil resources.

Implementation Measure:

- A. Develop and implement in conjunction with the U. S. Soil Conservation Service voluntary guidelines for farming operations on highly erodible soils. FY 91-92. (Public Works)

FARMLAND FLOODING

Objective: No increase in the level or intensity of flooding of intensively farmed land.

Intent: Many of the county's farmlands are prone to flooding, particularly in the southern portion of the county. An extensive system of levees and pumps has been developed to reduce flood damage in these areas. Rapid urbanization in Sacramento, Placer, and El Dorado Counties, however, has increased the proportion of land covered by impervious surfaces and channelization of natural streams. Increased runoff and channelization reduce the time required for storm waters to reach sea level. As a consequence, storms result in higher peak flows and more flooding than previously. The draft Conservation Element includes policies to require developers to develop runoff control strategies for, and to incorporate runoff control measures into, new developments. The following policy is intended to ensure that urban developments in the county do not increase flood damage in the county's farming areas.

Policy:

AG-27. The County shall minimize flood risks to agricultural lands resulting from new urban developments by:

- a) requiring that such developments incorporate adequate runoff control structures and/or
- b) assisting in implementing comprehensive drainage management plans to mitigate increased risks of farmland flooding resulting from such developments.

Implementation Measure:

- A. Require as a condition for project approval that developments in newly urbanizing areas of the county either a) incorporate runoff control measures adequate to contain the additional runoff from a 24-hour storm event with a 100-year recurrence interval that the project site would generate after it is developed, relative to the runoff from such a storm generated by the site before development, or b) conform to applicable standard conditions implementing comprehensive flood management plans. (Public Works)

SACRAMENTO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN
AGRICULTURAL ELEMENT

SECTION II

ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF AGRICULTURE

GOAL: Enhanced viability of Sacramento County's agricultural economy.

INTRODUCTION

This section provides a policy framework to strengthen Sacramento County's agricultural industries. Although County agencies have limited capability to affect the economic viability of farming directly, the County indirectly affects the socioeconomic conditions under which farmers operate through its zoning ordinance, taxation powers, and the programs of various County departments.

Economic viability of farming is addressed in the General Plan by the policies and programs discussed in this section, which are directed toward the following objectives.

1. Reduce crop and livestock productivity losses resulting from noxious weed infestations and wildfires.
2. Increase opportunities for farmers to provide on-farm housing for relatives and other employees who work on the farm.
3. Reduce the costs and administrative difficulty of obtaining permits for construction of accessory farm buildings in floodway fringe areas.
4. Increase opportunities for alternative commercial and industrial uses of agricultural lands.
5. Increase the equity of assessments imposed on farm properties for largely urban services.

PEST AND FIRE HAZARD CONTROL

Objective: Reduced crop and livestock productivity losses resulting from noxious weed infestations and wildfires.

Intent: Noxious weeds infest croplands and grazing lands and reduce their productivity. Johnsongrass, for example, commonly invades and contaminates a variety of seed, vegetable, and pasture crops. Other economically damaging weed pests in the county include yellow star-thistle, Klamathweed, puncture vine, and peppercress. Noxious weeds often disperse from roadside populations. Noxious weed control could be improved by reactivating the County's noxious weed program, which has been inactive for over 10 years.

Idled crop lands that have deteriorated from lack of management can cause problems for adjacent farmlands by providing sites for buildup and dispersal of crop pest populations. Abandoned orchards, for example, often attract tree-damaging insects and fungi and provide ideal conditions for buildups of their populations. Similarly, populations of rodents and other herbivores often increase on unmanaged lands and result in increased crop depredation on adjoining farms. Unmanaged grazing lands often produce heavy accumulations of highly flammable herbaceous matter. Improved pest and fire control measures on idled lands in farm areas would increase farm productivity.

Policies:

- AG-28. Provide a plan focused on noxious weed control in agricultural areas.
- AG-29. Control agricultural losses caused by pests and fires resulting from lack of management of idled farmlands.

Implementation Measures:

- A. Implement a noxious weed control program focusing on roadsides in agricultural areas. Ongoing. (Public Works)
- B. Publish and distribute annually a bulletin identifying important and emerging weed pests and delineating weed problem areas in the county. Ongoing. (Cooperative Extension)
- C. Provide farmers with technical assistance in weed control. Ongoing. (Agriculture Commissioner, Cooperative Extension)
- D. Adopt and enforce an ordinance establishing pest and fire management standards for idled lands in or adjacent to Permanent Agricultural and Agricultural-Residential zones. Ongoing. (Board of Supervisors, Agriculture Commissioner, Public Works)

FARM HOUSING

Objective: Increased flexibility and accountability for providing on-farm housing for relatives and other employees who work on the farm.

Intent: Many farms require on-site housing of farm employees. The County Zoning Code allows one accessory dwelling per 5 acres in Permanent Agricultural zones (i.e., AG-160, AG-80, AG-40, and AG-20), provided that such dwellings are occupied by at least one employee who receives a major portion of his or her income from such on-site employment. The Zoning Code, however, contains no provisions to facilitate verification that accessory dwellings are bona fide agricultural employee residences. A maximum density of one accessory dwelling per 5 acres could encourage developers or other landowners to establish residential settings for nonfarmers in Permanent-Agricultural zones

indistinguishable from housing in Agricultural-Residential zones. Such housing is incompatible with intensive commercial agriculture. Consequently, an amendment to the Zoning Code is required to enable the County to prevent abuse of the code's agricultural accessory dwelling provision.

Policy:

AG-30. The County shall allow construction and occupancy of agricultural accessory dwellings provided that such dwellings provide living quarters for full-time, on-site agricultural employees.

Implementation Measures:

A. Amend the County Zoning Code to ensure that the following requirements are met as conditions for construction of accessory dwelling units in Permanent Agricultural zones:

- records verifying employment of farm workers must be provided by the applicant;
- lot reductions and parcel splits are not permitted for the purpose of siting accessory dwelling units; and
- accessory dwelling units should be sited to minimize disruption of farming operations, avoid conversions of productive farmland, and take maximum advantage of existing facilities including utilities and driveways.

(Planning)

NONRESIDENTIAL ACCESSORY FARM STRUCTURES ON FLOODPLAINS

Objective: Reduced cost and difficulty of obtaining permits for construction of accessory farm buildings in floodway fringe areas.

Intent: Farmers who want to construct nonresidential farm structures in the non-floodway portions of floodplains are required by the County under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to prepare or have prepared initial studies to determine whether such structures could cause significant environmental effects. Initial studies prepared for such structures in Sacramento County, however, have never identified potentials for significant effects to result. Preparing initial studies is expensive and time-consuming. This issue primarily affects farmers in the Delta, Stone Lakes, and Cosumnes River areas of the county. The following policy seeks to ease the regulatory processes governing the building of farm accessory structures.

Policy:

- AG-31. Allow with as simple regulatory and administrative procedures as possible the construction of nonresidential farm accessory buildings in the floodway fringe provided such structures do not obstruct floodflows or impair public safety.

Implementation Measure:

- A. Evaluate County ordinance to implement Federal Emergency Management Agency requirements in a manner which simplifies the application process for constructing nonresidential farm accessory buildings in the floodway fringe. Consider and pursue the adoption of state and federal legislation, as appropriate. (Planning, Public Works)

ALTERNATIVE USES OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS

Objective: Increased opportunities to engage in alternative commercial or industrial uses of farmlands.

Intent: The County Zoning Code specifies which commercial activities are permitted on lands zoned for agriculture. Mining operations, for example, are permitted on agricultural properties within the County's surface mining overlay zone, subject to a conditional use permit. Outside the surface mining overlay zone, mining operations on agricultural lands require a rezone of the property and a conditional use permit. The County zoning ordinance restricts some farmers' ability to derive additional income from commercial aggregate mining operations.

The County zoning code also prohibits farmstand operators in agricultural zones from selling crops grown off the premises unless a conditional use permit is granted. Farmstand operators usually need to provide a large variety of fruits and vegetables throughout the year to attract and maintain customers.

The following policies would provide farmers and ranchers with greater opportunities for income generation.

Policies:

- AG-32. The County shall provide operators of farmstands greater flexibility with respect to the produce sold at such stands.

Implementation Measures:

- A. Amend the County Zoning Code to allow farmstand operators in Permanent Agricultural zones to sell produce grown off their farm, subject to a use permit, provided that produce grown on their farm accounts for at least 50 percent of the value of the stand's produce inventory.

AGRICULTURAL LAND ASSESSMENTS

Objective: Increased equity of assessments on agricultural land for services that primarily benefit urban residents.

Intent: Several of the assessment districts established to serve rural areas of the county have become increasingly urbanized in recent decades. Some of the services provided by such districts benefit urban residents more than farmers or ranchers. Additionally, some districts recently established in urbanizing areas of the county primarily to serve urban residents include agricultural lands. Examples of such urban services include fire protection, park and recreation services, and neighborhood street lighting. Tax increases and assessments levied to pay for such services are often applied on the basis of a fixed per-parcel fee. Such taxes and assessments are inequitable insofar as the proportion of costs paid by farmers exceeds the proportion of benefits received by farmers. This inequity is usually greatest when per-parcel fees are levied on vacant parcels, i.e., parcels that support a farm operation but have no residences. The following policy would increase the equity of property assessments.

Policy:

AG-33. The County shall ensure that proposed changes in dependent special district levies are equitable, especially where such changes could unduly increase the tax burden on owners of agricultural lands.

Implementation Measures:

- A. Develop and adopt procedures to review and evaluate proposed changes in dependent special district levies with respect to the equity of their sharing of costs and benefits between owners of lands in Permanent-Agricultural zones and owners of lands in other zones. FY 91-92. (Controller Auditor)
- B. Require as a condition for adoption that proposed changes in dependent special district levies are equitable for owners of agricultural lands. Ongoing. (Board of Supervisors)

CITATIONS

Jones & Stokes Associates, Inc. 1990a. Background report for the Sacramento County General Plan Agricultural Element. (JSA 90-160.) Sacramento, CA. Prepared for Sacramento County Planning and Community Development Department, Sacramento, CA.

_____. 1990b. Issue analysis and policy evaluation report for the Sacramento County General Plan Agricultural Element. (JSA 90-160.) Sacramento, CA. Prepared for Sacramento County Planning and Community Development Department, Sacramento, CA.

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